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AUTHOR	Alpern, Barbara E.
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ABSTRACT

Research on persistence to degree suggests that students' satisfaction with their institution is a good predictor of successfully completing a baccalaureate degree. This study examines the direct and indirect personal and institutional factors that influence community college transfer students' satisfaction with their baccalaureate institutions and, ultimately, their persistence to degree. Significant predictors in this study were transfer process, financial aid, and social integration. Results indicated that major issues affecting student satisfaction with the baccalaureate institution and persistence to degree include: (1) institutional influences at both the community college and baccalaureate institution; (2) student expectation of what is involved at both the community college and baccalaureate institution; (3) student expectations of what is involved in the transfer process; (4) student experiences in the execution of the transfer process; (5) student educational and career goals; and (6) factors affecting academic performance and time to degree. The author suggests that, as the acceptance of community college transfer students as equal partners in the higher education community increases, researchers and institutions should take the opportunity to assess student satisfaction and develop models of student persistence. Contains 83 references. (JA)

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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH THEIR BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTIONS

Barbara E. Alpern
Walsh College

This study examined the direct and indirect personal and institutional factors that influenced community college transfer students' satisfaction with their baccalaureate institutions and, ultimately, their persistence to degree. A conceptual model was proposed. Significant predictors were transfer process and financial aid information and social integration. Further studies are recommended.

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INTRODUCTION

A unique student body has emerged as a viable member of the higher education community. This group's evolution is the result of the extensive growth of community college and baccalaureate institution collaborations and is recognized by the diverse characteristics associated with nontraditional students. The traditional four-year college education is no longer the only route a student can follow to complete a baccalaureate degree. As the number of students, especially nontraditional students, seeking baccalaureate degrees continues to increase, the paths they take to achieve their goals differ. This growing population of students has created a need to examine the transfer process that has developed between community colleges and baccalaureate institutions, four-year as well as two-year (upper division) institutions and, in doing so, identify factors that influence transfer students' persistence to degree.

Some students who pursue their baccalaureate degrees by first attending a community college may not have planned their programs in great detail, the completion date is "somewhere in

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the future" – an unknown time. For others, the degree completion is a date already established – and may be one that is more than five years away. Entering into these planning ambiguities are individual personal traits such as educational and career goals, maturity, and culture. "The contemporary student, statistically speaking, is no longer upper middle class, adolescent, or male; instead the proportion of working-class and minority students has increased dramatically, older students are now commonplace, and women undergraduates now outnumber men" (London, 1992). This changed student profile has been reported by several researchers (e.g., Adelman, 1992; Cohen & Brawer, 1987, 1996; Eaton, 1990, 1992, 1994a; Grubb, 1991; Kintzer, 1997; Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985; Knoell, 1990, 1994; Palmer & Pugh, 1993).

It is important to understand and examine the factors that influence transfer students' perceptions of the transfer process as most attrition models, (i.e., Bean, 1985; Tinto, 1987), focus only on traditional undergraduate students (aged18-21 who matriculate directly into the baccalaureate institution). Research on persistence to degree suggests that students' satisfaction with their institution is a good predictor of completing a baccalaureate degree successfully. As persisters, students who "interact with the college or university organizationally, academically, and socially" (Bean, 1990, p.154), may interact with the college community on several levels. The college environment simultaneously can influence students to decide to persist or drop out of school. Major issues that may affect student satisfaction with the baccalaureate institution choice and influence persistence to degree include institutional influences at both the community college and baccalaureate institution, student expectations of what is involved in the transfer process, student experiences in the execution of the transfer process, student educational and career goals, and factors affecting academic performance and time to degree. According to Knoell (1990) and others (e.g., Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Eaton, 1993; Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985; Palmer,

Ludwig, & Stapleton, 1994; Palmer & Pugh, 1993), one of the strongest recruiting attractions for many baccalaureate institutions is the number of transfer credits it usually accepts from the community college.

The purpose of my study was to examine different facets of students' transitions from community colleges into baccalaureate institutions (i.e., personal elements, institutional influences, and academic and administrative support services provided from the community college and the baccalaureate institution). In accomplishing this end, the study also identifies variables that affect students' choice of a baccalaureate institution and their persistence.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A paucity of literature exists that discusses the experiences of students who begin their college education by attending a community college and then transfer to a baccalaureate institution. As a means of understanding the shift from beginning and completing an undergraduate degree at one institution to attending multiple institutions, researchers (e.g., Anglin, Davis, & Mooradian 1995; Cejda, 1997; Eaton, 1994a, 1994b; Nurkowski, 1995; Palmer & Pugh, 1993) have started to examine transfer students in terms of social adjustment, persistence to degree, academic outcomes, and satisfaction with the institutions. Student satisfaction outcomes often relate to credit hours, course transfer, core course completion, community college grade point average (GPA), counseling at both the community college and baccalaureate institution, orientation sessions at the baccalaureate institution, and transfer sheets given to community college students for planning their academic programs. Institution-specific facilitators and inhibitors may affect the transfer process: tuition, location, academic program availability, reputation of the community college or the baccalaureate institution, application of academic standards from both institutions, the results of interaction with institution personnel (i.e.,

counselors, financial aid officers), and environmental factors (i.e., campus social life, clubs and activities, and perceptions of acceptance by peers and faculty). A student's personal situation may also affect the choice of which baccalaureate institution to attend. These factors may include work schedule, commuter/residential choice, and family considerations.

Little has been written that discusses the experiences of students who begin their college education by attending a community college and then transfer to a baccalaureate institution. In a historical overview, Kintzer (1997) traced the articulation and transfer perspective from 1903 to the present and provided an overview of the seminal works which trace the evolution of the articulation and transfer process. His focus was on the development of the transfer process itself and the cooperation of administrative personnel from community colleges and baccalaureate institutions. Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattsheck, and Suppiger (1994), in a comprehensive historical review of community colleges, highlighted the need for this cooperative spirit. The lack of literature describing students' experiences with the transfer process itself may be due in some part to the lack of uniformity in reporting methods as indicated by Adelman (1992) and Grubb (1991). Researchers (e.g., Conklin 1993, 1995; Eaton, 1990, 1994b; Palmer, 1996; Tinto, 1997) also have indicated a need to investigate satisfaction with the institution as a transfer process factor that influences persistence to degree.

Reasons for Choosing the Transfer Process Path

Literature on choice of baccalaureate institution and academic program suggested that community college students express a multitude of reasons for beginning their college education at a community college with the intention of transferring to a baccalaureate institution. "Among these variables are ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education background, educational aspiration, and academic ability" (American Council on

Education, 1991, p. 28).

Researchers (e.g., Adelman, 1992; Cejda, 1997; Grubb, 1991; Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985; McCormick & Carroll, 1997; Palmer & Eaton, 1991; Palmer and Pugh, 1993; Sandler, 1998) found that students' personal goals and career aspirations often were linked to their college choice decisions. Discussions of the transfer process tend to center around the timing of students' decisions to transfer, when they actually make the transfer from community college to baccalaureate institution, student expectations for institutional support during the transfer, tracking student persistence through the transfer to degree, and evaluations of the transfer process utilized by the institutions. According to Bank, et al. (1992), no single predictive model (e.g., Bean, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1987) for retention decisions has been developed that dominates the study of student attrition based on expectancies.

One issue being addressed and often argued in the current literature is the definition of a "traditional" and "non-traditional" student. Many researchers (i.e., Astin, 1977; Bean, 1983; Tinto, 1987) only have included what they called "traditional students" in their studies to determine factors that influence student persistence and goal attainment. Stark, Shaw, & Lowther (1989) addressed the need to look beyond acceptance of traditional views of student goals.

Expectancies of Institutional Support

According to Bank, Biddle, and Slavings (1992), increasing emphasis is being placed on students' thoughts and opinions that incorporate their perceptions of social influences. This changing focus implied a redefinition of student persistence as a social psychological issue instead of a practical problem for baccalaureate institutions. In a study by Bauer and Bauer (1994), students who had transferred from community colleges to baccalaureate institutions perceived they received more personal attention from community college faculty than from baccalaureate

institution professors. Knoell (1990) reported a greater number of community college and baccalaureate institution personnel are involved in the transfer process than in previous years. Student counseling and recruitment have intensified to ease the process for students who begin their college education at a community college and then transfer to a baccalaureate-degree granting institution. As reported in various studies (e.g., Cohen & Brawer, 1987, 1996; Knoell, 1996; Palmer & Eaton, 1991), the 2 + 2 transfer process is one of the reasons cited by students when they plan their college career from entrance into a community college to completion of their degree at a baccalaureate institution.

Academic Transfer and Persistence to Degree

Johnson (1987) stressed the need to identify and research factors that influence transfer students' persistence to baccalaureate degree as she cited three primary reasons students withdraw from college: "...dissatisfaction with academic programs, unclear career objectives, and unclear educational goals..." (p. 323). In addition, academic integration was significantly associated with academic satisfaction. Palmer (1986) raised the issue of student competency in his review of the successes and failures of the transfer process. Eight years later, Palmer, Ludwig, & Stapleton (1994) provided evidence from a 13-state study "...that community college students who transfer successfully to baccalaureate-granting institutions have relatively high levels of academic ability and are as academically competent as students who begin their post-secondary studies at four-year institutions" (p.1). This study concluded that students who attended community colleges and transferred to baccalaureate institutions were not disadvantaged by attending the community college instead of entering the baccalaureate institution as freshmen.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reported satisfaction with institution choice is a good predictor for completing a baccalaureate degree successfully. Yet, minimal research has been done

to examine transfer students' persistence to degree at baccalaureate institutions (e.g., Cejda, 1997; Eaton, 1994a; Nurkowski, 1995). While a body of literature by a limited number of researchers (e.g., Adelman, 1992; Cohen & Brawer, 1987, 1992; Eaton, 1990, 1994a; Grubb, 1991; Kintzer, 1982, 1996, 1997; Knoell, 1990, 1996; McCormick & Carroll, 1997; Palmer & Pugh 1993) exists on college transfer, most of the literature does not follow students beyond the freshman to sophomore year experience at either a community college or a baccalaureate institution. Few studies have focused on students' expectations of the transfer process, their actual experiences, the influence of those expectations and experiences on institution choice, their satisfaction with the baccalaureate institution, and persistence to the baccalaureate degree. Knoell (1994) recommended that baccalaureate institutions assess the transfer process and examine the strengths and weaknesses of the transfer function. Eaton (1994b) concurred and suggested that an examination of intra-institutional factors that may influence transfer persistence from the community college to the baccalaureate institution be undertaken. Hilmer (1997) examined a community college student's choice of baccalaureate institution to which s/he is transferring. He found, "Several studies have indicated that transfer students receive similar grades and are as likely to graduate from the institution to which they transfer as are continuous attendees..." (p. 59).

Theoretical Models of Persistence/Attrition

Ample literature (e.g., Bean, 1983, 1990; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 1991; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1988, 1993; Webb, 1988, 1989) approaches student persistence from the standpoint of attrition (i.e., determining factors that influence a student to drop out or stop out and, perhaps, not complete a degree). Tinto (1988) acknowledged this body of literature as he addressed the issue of lack of literature dealing with student attrition beyond the freshman

year. Bean's (1983) Student Attrition Model and Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model make the assumption that college persistence is the interaction among personal and institutional factors and intent to persist is the result of the appropriate pairing of student and institution. A later study by Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) reported the significance of the influence of external factors and a student's intentions to persist to degree. They reviewed Bean's Student Attrition Model and Tinto's Student Integration Model and suggested "...the two theories could be merged to illuminate better our understanding of the college persistence process" (p. 143). Although Tinto revised his model somewhat, the emphasis was still on social integration (Webb, 1988).

Pascarella (in Webb, 1988) developed a model of college retention/attrition that focused on the importance of informal contact with faculty. Pascarella's model showed that background characteristics interact with institutional factors that may have a causal effect on informal contact between students and faculty as well as other types of college experiences and educational outcomes. According to Webb, Pascarella concluded that educational outcomes had a direct influence on dropout decisions.

Factors Affecting Persistence

"Other things being equal, one would anticipate goal commitment to be directly related to persistence in college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 93). Tinto also suggested that the influences or pressures of institutional characteristics may impact student persistence. However, he cited a lack of literature to support this interpretation.

Cohen and Brawer (1996) presented an argument for further investigation into the transfer students' goal attainment. They disagreed with Astin's (in Cohen & Brawer) views of what factors influence a student's goal attainment because Astin focused on traditional students' social

background and motivational factors that could influence completion of a degree: campus residence, peer group interaction, and full-time-student status. These factors are rarely found in community colleges. According to Cohen and Brawer, Astin (1977) found most two-year institutions do not have residence halls; they enroll students who have lesser ability, who attend on a part-time basis, and who are employed off campus. Astin suggested that this combination of individual and institutional factors associated with community college transfers can reduce the probability that these students will persist at the community college and transfer to a baccalaureate institution.

However, there is current literature that wishes to reach beyond the established views. Recently, Tinto (1997) approached student persistence from a new perspective. He reported the results of learning communities and collaborative learning strategies on community college students' learning and persistence and found that participation in a cooperative learning group helps students develop a network of support among their peers. This network is useful in engaging community college students into the academic life of the community college. Tinto stated, "...we have yet to fully understand the educational character of persistence in higher education" (p.601). He argued, "Though it is evident that classrooms matter...little has been done to explore *how* it [academic integration] comes, over time, to shape student persistence" (p. 599). Tinto has joined a growing list of researchers (e.g., Cabrera, et al., 1992; Kinnick, et al., 1997; Pascarella, Hagedorn, Edison, Terenzini, and Nora, 1998; Piland 1995) who are using established models and/or longitudinal studies of student persistence to degree as springboards in their quests for new approaches to understanding persistence. The door has been opened for further research opportunities.

A review of literature produced a limited number of reports that focused on student

employment and persistence to degree. These reports (Condition of Education, 1997; Condition of Education 1998; Condition of Education 1999), using data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), offer some insight into the specific relationships of working students that Tinto discussed in his 1997 article on student persistence. The most current data are based on 1997-1999 NCES longitudinal data surveys. These data report more students are working while going to school to cover the costs of higher education. Consequently, many of these students have less time to devote to their studies, thus extending the time needed to attain a baccalaureate degree. Cuccaro-Alamin (1997), using NCES data, reported that students who delayed their college enrollment or who began in a 2-year institution [and who had worked or were working part- or full-time] were more than twice as likely to take more than six years after starting college to complete their bachelor's degree. These governmental data show there is a need to examine further the influence of student employment on persistence to degree.

Future of Research on Transfer Students

An emerging body of literature suggests changes in how transfer students and their persistence to baccalaureate degree should be studied. For over two decades little attention was paid to community college transfer students. Tinto (1993, 1997) and Pascarella (1997) have enacted a dialog that suggested this body of students has been overlooked and should now be considered more frequently in the research concerning student social integration, student attrition, and persistence to baccalaureate degree. One major agreement among the researchers detailing the transfer process is the lack of studies from which to build models that include transfer student profiles. As reported by Levine (1986), researchers have presented conflicting viewpoints about the underlying intent of the junior/community college mission and curriculum design. In doing so, they have virtually ignored the community college transfer student and the issues that these

students bring to the educational arena.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

A model has been developed for the present study that integrates the literature on the transfer process and student persistence. The literature on persistence has reported that if students rate their baccalaureate institution highly and they experience personal fit or integration, then they tend to persist. This literature also suggests that students' academic goals, preparation, performance and social integration predict persistence. The literature on the transfer process suggests that personal elements affect whether students even consider obtaining a baccalaureate degree and that the students' perceptions of institutional support affects their fit with the baccalaureate institution. Figure 1 presents a model that links the literature on transfer and on student persistence.

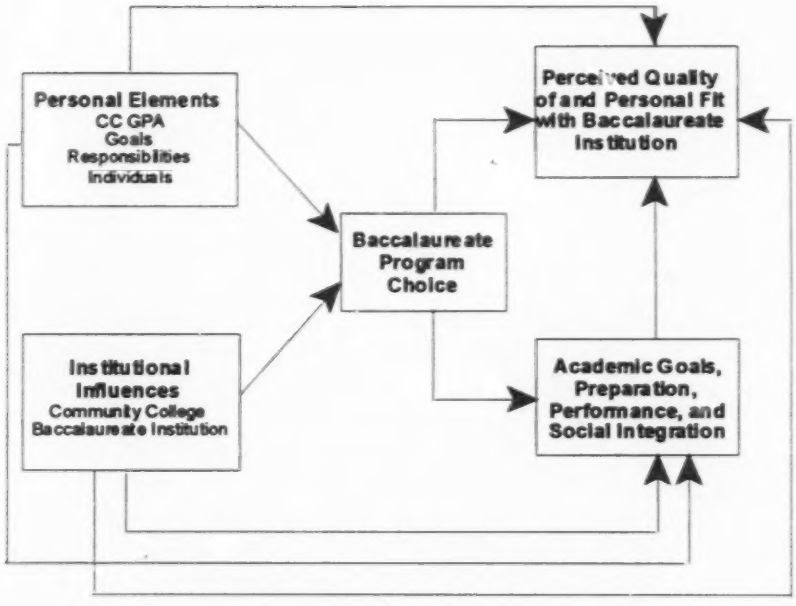

Figure 1 - Model for Influences of the Transfer Process and Perceived Quality of and Personal Fit with the Baccalaureate Institution

The first construct on the model for this study, **Personal Elements**, includes personal characteristics that affect baccalaureate program and institution choice: age, gender, marital status, dependents, economic status, individual responsibilities and goals (educational and career), educational history (number of institutions attended, community college GPA, number of credit hours transferred and number completed at the baccalaureate institution), and employment history (number of hours worked while attending community college and/or baccalaureate institution). As previously cited research (e.g., Asher & Skenes, 1993; Astin, 1993a, 1993b; Bean, 1983; Braxton, 1990; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Richardson & Bender 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) focused on native students who enter baccalaureate institutions directly from high school. Later studies (e.g., Tinto, 1997; Pascarella, 1997) began to infer there is a marked distinction between the individual characteristics that may affect a freshman student's choice and persistence and those that may affect older, non-traditional, community college transfer students.

Institutional Influences, the second construct on the model, focuses on the students' perceived satisfaction with their community college and baccalaureate institution, particularly support services received prior to admission and enrollment in the baccalaureate institution. These services include transfer process information (program-specific transfer sheets that detailed credit hours that would transfer to the baccalaureate institution and course equivalencies), academic advising and counseling, and financial aid information. Levine and Nidiffer (1996) reported the lack of financial aid as a major deterrent for entering community college students.

The third construct, **Baccalaureate Program Choice**, is included to take into account the fact that availability and reputation of particular academic majors may influence students' choice of baccalaureate institution.

The fourth construct, **Academic Goals, Preparation, Performance, and Social**

Integration is included to assess the influence of the academic and social integration factors on students' perceptions of the quality of and personal fit with the baccalaureate institution. Among these factors are academic preparation from the community college, academic challenge, baccalaureate institution GPA, current educational goal, and social integration at the baccalaureate institution. Several investigators have suggested that students' academic goals, particularly commitment to degree attainment, are key to persistence (e.g., Johnson, 1987; Palmer, Ludwig, & Stapleton, 1994). A measure of the success or failure of a student's academic progress and persistence is reflected in the student's grade point averages (GPA). Previous studies (e.g., Alterman, 1992; Dougherty, 1992; Grubb, 1991) are divided on whether transfer students were as academically prepared for their baccalaureate institution as were native students. Recent studies (e.g., Palmer, et al., 1994) suggested that transfer students do as well as native students. Tinto (1975, 1988, 1993, 1997) and others have demonstrated the impact of students' sense of connection to their campuses on their degree attainment.

The final construct in the model, **Perceived Quality of and Personal Fit with the Baccalaureate Institution,** incorporates the literature on students' satisfaction with their campuses. Previous research (e.g., Bauer & Bauer, 1994; Pike & Simpson, 1997) has shown that students who are pleased with instructional quality and support services and believe they made a good choice of campus are more likely to persist to degree completion. Included in this construct were students' perceived quality of instruction and academic advising, institutional support at enrollment, institution career-related support services, initial perceptions of and personal fit with their baccalaureate institution.

In sum, the model assumes that personal characteristics will directly influence students' perceptions of quality of and personal fit with their baccalaureate institution. However,

characteristics such as community college GPA may also indirectly affect these perceptions and fit through both program choice and academic goals, preparation, performance, and social integration. Similarly, Institutional Influences are assumed to have both direct and indirect effects on perceptions of quality and fit. Here, the model takes into account articulation agreements and quality of instruction that may affect program choice and academic performance at the baccalaureate institution.

Baccalaureate program choice is shown to have direct effects on perceptions of quality and fit, so that the model captures both program choice and the more general institutional level influences. The indirect effects through Academic Goals, Preparation, Performance and Social Integration are included to take into account variations in academic demands, admission standards, and social integration that can affect academic challenge. Academic Goals, Preparation, Performance, and Social Integration are known directly to influence native students' perceptions of their campuses. The model assumes this is true of community college transfer students as well, and that this construct can mediate the influences of other constructs in the model.

Data from my study reveal three significant direct effects of personal and institutional influences on community college transfer students' satisfaction with their baccalaureate institution and persistence to degree: transfer process information, financial aid information, and social integration at the baccalaureate institution.

METHODOLOGY

Participants A purposive sample of community college transfer students from three diverse baccalaureate institutions included students who had to have transferred at least 30 credit hours from their community colleges and, at the time of the study, had completed a total of 100 credit hours of coursework toward their baccalaureate degrees. The 100 credit hours included

coursework completed at the community colleges as well as at their baccalaureate institutions. Using a 100 credit hour criterion provided these students with adequate experiences at both their community colleges and baccalaureate institutions to complete the questionnaire. Furthermore, the 100 hours meant the individuals were at least juniors and, hence, had demonstrated persistence toward degree. The students were enrolled in a myriad of programs and were planning on entering a variety of career fields following completion of their degrees. A total of 1,881 surveys were distributed, and 541 were returned for 28.8% response rate.

Data Collection and Analysis These transfer students were asked to complete a mailed survey that was adapted from one administered in previous studies. The survey includes 102 questions about students' experiences at their community colleges and baccalaureate institutions and factors that influence their selection of a particular baccalaureate college, as well as questions about their educational and career goals, academic performance, and personal demographics. Although they were selected as a convenience sample, these three distinct baccalaureate institutions provided an opportunity to obtain a broad range of responses from students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds with varied educational and career goals, as these three institutions differed in mission, governance, and degree programs offered. The institutions were located in diverse geographic areas, with two considered commuter institutions and one residential.

The survey data were analyzed separately to take into account differences across campuses. The results of the data analysis provided a comparison of institutional samples by school. Responses to the open-ended questions were summarized and presented to support the quantitative analyses.

Analysis and Results

The primary question that guided the data analysis was: What are the relative direct and

indirect effects of features of the community college and baccalaureate institutions attended and personal elements of transfer students that affect their perceptions of the quality of and personal fit with their baccalaureate institution?

The survey data were analyzed separately, by campus, to take into account institutional differences. Factor analyses were run to develop measures of each of the theoretical constructs in the model. Correlations were run between each of the predictors and outcome measures to identify variables to be entered into the final statistical analyses. Multiple regression analyses were run to determine the direct and indirect effects of Personal Elements, Institutional Influences, Baccalaureate Program Choice and Academic Goals, Preparation, Performance, and Social Integration on students' Perceived Quality of and Personal Fit with the Baccalaureate Institution. Responses to the open-ended questions were summarized and presented to support the quantitative analyses.

Direct effects of Personal Elements were seen as students reported they decided to attend their baccalaureate institutions before they enrolled in their community college, underscoring their intention to transfer as part of their educational and career goals. These findings contradict earlier literature that transfer students did not do well following transfer (e.g., Astin, 1977; Tinto, 1975, 1987) and support Cejda (1997) and Diaz (1992), when these students self-reported they did not experience grade point average GPA transfer shock at their baccalaureate institutions. Transfer process and financial aid information (Institutional Influences) also mediated direct effects on students' satisfaction with their baccalaureate institutions as students expressed their desire to have accurate and timely information available before, during, and following transfer. For many students, their academic program (Baccalaureate Program Choice) was determined prior to community college enrollment and that choice had not changed. Social Integration (Academic

Goals, Preparation, Performance, and Social Integration) is important to community college transfer students, although they may not be able to participate frequently in specific events or undertake leadership roles. Indirect effects varied by institution with academic challenge, social integration, and community college GPA being reported as influential.

Findings and Discussion

Today's college population is diverse. More students are choosing different educational paths to complete their baccalaureate degrees because this student body must react to personal and institutional influences usually not considered important in previous studies. There is a growing realization that greater attention must be paid to community college transfer students, their personal experiences, how the transfer process affects their satisfaction with their baccalaureate institution, and their persistence to obtain a baccalaureate degree.

What appears to be important is that a variety of institutional support services influence student satisfaction and persistence. These findings seem to indicate that transfer students looked to the community colleges and baccalaureate institutions to provide precise and applicable institution-related information (transfer process and financial aid information), regardless of the academic program being pursued or of the institution attended.

The data suggest that today, as more students are electing to begin their postsecondary education at the community college with the intention of transferring to a baccalaureate institution to complete their degree, they want transfer process and financial aid information that would help them plan their programs at their community college and facilitate their transition to their baccalaureate institution. If the information they received was accurate and they moved through the transfer process with little trouble, the students reported satisfaction with their baccalaureate institution. If the students had difficulty with the transfer process, or they received inaccurate

academic counseling that required them to complete additional courses at the baccalaureate institution, the students were not satisfied with the quality of institutional support.

The findings also suggested another factor that influenced students' program choice and academic performance. Many students (n=424, 80.3%) reported they had developed educational goals before they began the transfer process and these goals had not changed. For many of these students, the academic program at their baccalaureate institution was selected when they enrolled at their community college, and their focus did not change. The findings reinforce the premise that many students have established their career and educational goals and know in advance of their intention to transfer to baccalaureate institutions. As a result, they have devised plans to achieve their goals.

It appeared that students who did well at the community college expected to do well at the baccalaureate institution; it does not appear that students experienced transfer shock. Cejda (1997) and Diaz (1992) reported that transfer students' GPAs dropped following transfer to their baccalaureate institution, but their grades improved after one semester. These reports contradicted earlier literature that transfer students did not do well following transfer. Early literature (e.g., Astin, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1975, 1987) summarily dismissed community college transfer students and gave them little mention as viable members of the educational community. However, Levine (1986) emphasized the need to reconsider this point of view. My study supported the premise that community college GPA was influential in baccalaureate institution choice and provided evidence that transfer students may not suffer a substantial drop in their baccalaureate GPA. The students self-reported their community college and baccalaureate GPAs, and their grades did not show a significant decline after the transfer occurred.

Another example of the importance of the transfer process information is reported in the open-ended responses. Based on their experiences at both the community college and the baccalaureate institution, students reported positive and negative transfer process experiences and provided comments regarding specific changes in the transfer process they would like to see. Suggested changes focused on the need for better communication of transfer and orientation procedures, more information about financial aid, more contact with advising and counseling, greater involvement of faculty/advising in program development, and greater cooperation between the community college and baccalaureate institution in providing institutional support services. Students stated their interactions with faculty and with the transfer process information they received regarding their academic program and the number of credits that would transfer. The more credits that transferred meant less enrollment time at the baccalaureate institution and, therefore, less time required to attain the degree. This difference in time may be considered critical to persistence to degree. Some students reported they appreciated the care and time faculty spent with them; others felt faculty were distant – literally and figuratively. These factors appeared to influence students' success in the classroom and indicate the strength of community college transfer students' perceived satisfaction with the transfer process and their baccalaureate institution as they persist to degree. Representative comments/suggestions on each of these areas include:

Negative comments/suggestions:

Provide an orientation for transfer students to reinforce the difficulties of a 4-year institution.

Have more one-to-one, student-advisor communication about transfer status, including detailed explanation of transfer credits and course work requirements.

Provide more counseling on scholarships and financial aid opportunities and what to expect.

Some instructors are unavailable to help or answer questions.

Positive comments/suggestions:
Had sufficient help/support from faculty and advising to reach the goal of transferring.
Almost all credits transferred.
Have more four-year institutions work with community colleges to set up programs where more credits transfer.
Overall, positive experiences outweighed the few negative ones.

One intent of my study was to see if factors from the students' personal lives may have affected their transfer process and their persistence to degree. For example, a majority of the total sample reported they had taken a break in their programs at either the community college or baccalaureate institution (n=164, 65.9%), followed by marriage (n=158. 58/7%), and job acquisition (n=157, 64.3%). Students from all three institutions also responded, through open-ended questions, that personal elements (i.e., family/job responsibilities) played an important role in their enrollment patterns. Even though the results for each of the three institutions differed, there appeared to be a consensus that certain personal elements and institutional support services influenced students' decisions to embark on the transfer process route to baccalaureate degree. Therefore it is important to review the issues present in the responses:

> A consistent finding across the three institutions showed that students were more likely to have made their decisions to attend their baccalaureate institutions prior to beginning their community college programs. The majority of students transferred to the baccalaureate institutions without graduating from their community college.
>
> The decision to transfer to a baccalaureate institution at a specific time may have been based on the number of credit hours the baccalaureate institution accepted.
>
> A majority of students from all three institutions had identified educational goals when they began their community college education. Most students had not changed their educational goals and still sought to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Students reported a continuance of their original educational goals, not changes in them, even when their education may have been interrupted. Working part- or full-time while attending school appeared to have some influence on persistence to degree. The majority of students at the three institutions reported they worked part- or full-time while attending their

community colleges and were employed while attending their baccalaureate institutions.

Implications from the Findings

The findings have implications for community colleges and baccalaureate institutions, as well as for higher education researchers and government legislators. Researchers, baccalaureate institution administrators, and academic personnel should embrace community college transfer students as viable members of the college community. As is apparent in recent literature (Pascarella, 1997; Tinto, 1997), the college student profile is no longer narrowly defined; the current student profile encompasses community college transfer students.

The conceptual model proposed in my study offered an opportunity to examine additional personal and institutional factors that may influence community college transfer students' perceived quality of and personal fit with their baccalaureate institution as they persist to degree. The model found few significant differences across the institutions; these results do not imply that the factors are not important. In fact, the lack of consistency across all institutions suggested the need to develop multiple models that reflect specific transfer partnerships.

My study emphasized the need to examine the transfer student profile and related transfer process issues in greater depth and to identify factors that may reflect unique influences on this student body. Researchers should seek to identify factors that influence transfer students' satisfaction with their baccalaureate institution and their persistence to degree as a result of their experiences with their transfer process. Issues dealing with why transfer students drop out before completing their baccalaureate degree should be examined. Models, using constructs from previous studies, should be proposed that incorporate persistence issues related to community college transfer students, such as personal elements, institutional influences, program choice,

academic challenge, and social integration. Not all of these influences may appear important on several levels. The data in the present study suggest that the type of baccalaureate institution to which individuals transferred seemed to lead to different predictors of perceived quality.

As reported in the literature (e.g., Adelman, 1992; Grubb, 1991; Laanan & Sanchez, 1996), there is no single formula for tracking transfer students as they move from and through institutions. Researchers should devise and test tracking procedures and enrollment patterns for transfer students. The results of the data should be shared among community colleges and baccalaureate institutions that enroll the same students. Students' academic and enrollment records should be maintained as continuous documents between institutions. Stronger cooperation between institutions could, over time, result in greater student satisfaction. In addition to reporting enrollment patterns of specific institutions, researchers could undertake longitudinal studies that analyze national databases that track enrollment patterns of persisters and dropouts. The results of these studies could provide researchers with important data that identify influential factors reported by community college transfer students in their decision to persist. These data might reveal similarities and/or differences in influential factors affecting persistence between transfer students and those students who enrolled in their baccalaureate institutions as freshmen. Further studies that chronicle transfer students' progress as they persist to degree could provide insightful data for administrators and program developers at community colleges and baccalaureate institutions.

Joint efforts by academic and administrative community college and baccalaureate institution personnel should continue as a link to improve existing articulation agreements and seek innovative methods to broaden transfer students' accessibility to attain baccalaureate degrees. Greater attention should be paid to how personal interaction by institutional

representatives is viewed by transfer students. The influence of academic advising, either by counselors or faculty, should be examined and reported so other institutions may find the results helpful. Surveys and focus groups that cover issues specific to the institution, such as orientation methods, should be expanded. Results of these studies should be reported so a generalized format could be developed for possible implementation by other institutions. Transfer students depend on the integrity of institutions to prepare them for their careers.

The social integration needs of community college transfer students should not be overlooked. Because many of these transfer students work while they attend school, they may not have the time to participate in student activities or assume leadership roles, such as student council, even if they have the desire to do so. Activities that promote greater social integration should be organized around transfer students' schedules, or should be integrated into the classroom community as suggested by Tinto (1997).

As the acceptance of community college transfer students as equal partners in the higher education community increases, researchers and institutions should take the opportunity to identify, analyze, and report the direct and indirect effects of personal and institutional influences on students' satisfaction with the transfer process. Once these factors are studied and data reported, generalized models of student persistence should be developed and tested.

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